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# THE MORNING NEWS

*Your Source for local news in English* Caya G.F. Betico Croes 111 T. 588-9517 F. 5889518.

A decorative banner for 'THE MORNING NEWS'. The title is in large, bold, black letters. The word 'THE' is partially obscured by a green cactus. The word 'MORNING' has a bright yellow sun with rays behind the 'O'. A green lizard is positioned below the 'N' in 'MORNING'. The word 'NEWS' is partially obscured by a blue map of Aruba. To the right of the map is a 'Seasons Greetings' message with a small Christmas tree and golden bells. The banner is set against a yellow background with a black border on the left.

# US to reach debt limit on New Years Eve

WASHINGTON (AFP) - The United States federal government will reach its statutory debt limit -- as imposed by Congress -- on December 31, Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner said yesterday.

In a letter to the top Demo-

crat in Congress, Geithner said the Treasury will shortly begin taking extraordinary measures to "temporarily postpone the date that the United States would otherwise default on its legal obligations."

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ORANJESTAD -- Last Friday afternoon, the Prime Minister, union members, representatives of public workers reached a satisfactory agreement with respect to the cost of living index and formally signed the accord.

The Prime Minister was pleased with the manner in which the union members deliberated and was willing to stay within the maximum available range. He was also pleased that public servants will be able to receive the agreed cost of living index adjustment. For public servants, this is the third year that they are receiving an adjustment.

The signed agreement entails that as of January 1st, 2013, Afls. 85 will be included in the salary of public servants as a compensation for the loss of buying power over the period September 2011 to August 31, 2012. As a compensation for the loss of buying power compared to 2002 to 2007 they will receive the so-called



bashi-premie of Afls.150. The sum will become Afls.1500 and will be paid on the 10th of January 2013. To compensate for the rest of the loss of buying power of the same period,

they will also receive an increase of the "gelijkbedrag" which is paid out in November, and which will also be Afs. 1500.

**Continued on page 2**

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## Laguna Restaurant reopens at Radisson Aruba Resort Casino & Spa



Laguna restaurant, Radisson Aruba Resort Casino & Spa invited press members to experience its freshly renovated look on Thursday, over Prime Rib Royal, with the signature of Executive Chef Kien Fat Lie Kwie, clearly present in every delicious bite!

The themed buffets served on Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday include an impressive fresh salad bar, iced shrimp, Mediterranean antipasto, hot dishes, a great selection of sides, imported cheeses and home-made desserts, served in a refreshed

dining room or on the terrace overlooking the famed tropical garden and lazy river.

Thursday's Prime Rib, and Yorkshire pudding - a tasty puff, pop-over - were hand-carved and served au Jus, with horseradish cream and béarnaise sauces, as options.

Dynamic director of restaurants Sheldon Leuden and recently welcomed Director of Food & Beverage Mark Naber were on hand to greet over two dozen media personalities who gave the buffet raving reviews!

## Government and other parties sign...

*Continued from page 1*

The rest of the money that civil servants must receive for the loss of buying power in the period 2002 to 2007, in keeping with the government's financial situation, will be paid as of January 2014 during a four year pe-

riod. This will be by means of a 'bashie-premie and gelijkbedrag,' or by means of a repair premium, with at least 1.9% in addition to the salaries.

After the formal signing of the accord, they an-

nounced that they will institute a special commission to deal with finding the best possible formula for the business of cost of living indexes and the loss of buying power.

# post aruba

## ANNOUNCEMENT

Post Aruba N.V. would like to inform its clients on the opening hours:

**On December 28, 2012:**

- The offices of Oranjestad, Harbor Area, Santa Cruz and San Nicolas will be open until 12pm.
- The office Palm Beach Plaza Mall will be open from 10am until 6pm.

**On December 29, 2012:**

- The office of Palm Beach Plaza Mall will be open from 8am until 6pm.
- The office of Harbour Area will be open from 9am until 3pm.

**On December 31, 2012, January 1 and 2, 2013:**

- All the Aruba Post offices will be closed. The offices of Post Aruba will open for normal business on January 3, 2013.

Management and staff would like to wish you a Happy and Blessed New Year.

Sincerely,

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## 2

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## Curacao censured for 'shock' airport tax hikes

Members of the Latin American and Caribbean Air Transport Association have criticised the decision of authorities in Curacao to hike airport taxes and landing fees by 150%, it was reported this week.

Passenger Facility Charges (PFC) and landing fees were hiked overnight by 150% on December 1, 2012, with airlines only receiving notification on November 30, 2012.

Although the Curacao airport authority has said it will assume the cost of the PFC increase on tickets previously sold at a price that included the previous level of PFC, operators will be required to absorb the additional taxes on fares al-

ready sold that are scheduled to depart after February 28, 2013.

"This initiative is deplorable and counters International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) recommended practices for several reasons. Carriers condemn the tax increase implementation by the airport authorities, as it will negatively affect not only passengers and airlines but the economy of the island. Raising taxes by 150%, from one day to the next, is drastic and unheard of," ALTA said.

The air transport industry currently supports 5.4 million jobs and USD125bn in GDP in Latin America and the Caribbean, directly creating an estimated 524,000 jobs in 2010 and a total of more than 4.0 million jobs supported through the catalytic impacts of travel and tourism. ALTA highlighted that raising airport taxes and fees proves to be detrimental for the local economies, causing a sharp decline in both the number of visitors to a destination, and the number of tourism related jobs within that destination.

## Government considers Oncology Program for IMSAN

Not too long ago, the government of Aruba had announced that there will be different important developments planned for the next year for the local field of medicine.

One of those programs, which it is believed will have an impact particularly on the welfare of our cancer patients, is the expansion of the facilities of IMSAN - Instituto Medico di San Nicolas. These facilities will include a chemotherapy center and radiotherapy, known locally as "chemo" and "bestraling."

The Oncology Center will be an excellent addition to IMSAN, where there is a space already constructed as a necessary bunker for the radiotherapy, or the "linear accelerator," which will mean that IMSAN will become a center for specialized care.

Director of IMSAN, Dr. Joel Rajnherc, explained the benefits that this center would have for the community of Aruba to have our

own Oncology Center.

Our local team of specialists in Oncology is involved in all phases of the development and is supporting the government's vision completely. Together with Baptist Health South Florida and our local specialists, they will be complementing each other. Our local specialists will be the backbone of this project and will be the ones to execute the program, according to Minister Visser.

One of the important aspects of this program will be the upgrading and training of the nurses of the radiotherapy and other departments with different ontological special-



lization.

The Linear Accelerator that Aruba will acquire will be one of the most advanced technologically on the market today. This news is very positive for Aruba and especially for those patients who will be able to receive care right here at home.

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## Famed ballet star Leonid Kozlov and company perform "The Nutcracker" this weekend

In 2007, a long-time visitor to Aruba decided to make it his second home. Leonid Kozlov, former principle dancer of the Bolshoi and New York Ballet and star of the Broadway revival of "On Your Toes," with his wife, prima-ballerina Adriana, settled on the island part-time. Their love of dance involved them with the local dance community, bringing sumptuous productions to the island every holiday season. Leonid has blazed a stellar career in classical ballet, inspiring young dancers around the world.

Leonid defection to the west is the stuff of movie scripts. He dodged a cadre of KGB agents that surrounded Shrine Auditorium in Los Angeles in 1979 to

achieve creative freedom and forge a new career. He was immediately invited to star with the Australian National Ballet out of Melbourne, where he first staged his production of the Nutcracker Suite. Eventually, he was invited by George Balanchine to become a lead performer with the New York Ballet Company, and in 1991 opened the Kozlov Dance Studio, where he met his wife, prima ballerina Adriana.

Leonid and Adriana spend the holidays on Aruba, joined by some of the finest dancers in the Tri State New York area, during which they offer workshops and star in productions. One of the most beloved holiday traditions in many of the great cities around the world,

the staging of "Nutcracker Suite" by Tchaikovsky, was performed for the first time in Aruba at the Cas di Cultura in January of 2008.

This year, forty young dancers from the local Club di Movimiento will be participating in the production. They hope island visitors will take advantage of this opportunity to enjoy this immortal holiday experience performed with top international stars and the talented Aruban dancers.

Albert Davydov, principal dancer with the New Jersey Ballet will join the troupe for the special New Year's Gala performance at the Occidental Grand Resort in Palm Beach on Tuesday, January 1. He will be dancing a show-stopping pas



de deux with young ballet sensation, Sofia Greenbaum. It is called "Diana and "Acteon Pas de Deux."

He will also perform an exciting Russian Gopak filled with high flying leaps and intricate jumps. The Occidental show will consist of a varied program of classic ballet, folkloric dance, tango and a new work by Leonid Kozlov titled "Impulse," an intricate jazz on pointe number dance.

The production of "The Nutcracker" features stunning costumes and sets produced by Russian masters. This beautiful ballet will be performed at Aruba's Cas di Cultura on Saturday, December 29 at 8:00 PM and on Sunday, December 30 at 4:00 PM. Tickets are 35 Aruban florins, or \$20. Tickets are on sale at Van Dorp Bookstores on Avenida Milio Croes in Dakota, and also their branch outlets at the Divi Resort, Tamarijn Resort and Holiday Inn, plus the Cas di Cultura.



Sophi Greenbaum and Albert Davydov

Reservations can be made by calling 582-1010. The special New Year's Day performance is the same price, and tickets can be purchased at the concierge desk in the Occidental Grand Resort in Palm Beach, or visit their website: [www.dance-aruba.com](http://www.dance-aruba.com) to reserve online.

Rosalie Klein



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## Hyatt denied bid to resume control of troubled Curacao luxury resort

WILLEMSTAD – Santa Barbara Hospitality, N.V., a hotel investment group, on December 24 announced that a Curaçao court has denied a bid by Hyatt Corporation and Hyatt Curaçao, N.V. ("Hyatt") to resume control of the former Hyatt Regency Curaçao Golf Resort, Spa and Marina.

Following a hearing on Friday, December 21, 2012, the Trial Court of Curaçao issued an order stating that it would not grant Hyatt the injunctive relief it was seeking. The brand management company lost its bid to resume managerial control of the luxury resort from which it was removed on December 15, 2012.

On December 15, 2012, Santa Barbara Hospitality, N.V. removed Hyatt as manager of the resort, renamed the property as the Santa Barbara Beach & Golf Resort, Curaçao, and installed Benchmark Hospitality International ("Benchmark") as the property manager. The owner had terminated its management agreement with Hyatt on November 21, 2012, but Hyatt had refused to leave the property.

Benchmark now manages the 350-room luxury resort. Most employees are retaining their jobs and maintaining their current rate of pay, original start date and accrued vacation. All current reservations and event bookings are being honored without change.

## Seven dead as US storm snarls post-Christmas travel

CHICAGO (AFP) - A massive winter storm system that whipped up tornadoes, ice and snow from the Gulf of Mexico to the Great Lakes on Christmas Day, killed at least seven people, as it headed for the northeastern US yesterday.

The storm snarled holiday travel as 1,500 flights were cancelled and people were warned to stay home rather than brave the strong winds, freezing temperatures and treacherous roads.

The weather service forecast up to 18 inches of snow

from New York state up to Maine and warned of freezing rain, tornadoes and severe thunderstorms all the way down to the Carolinas. Areas in the Rocky Mountains were also set to get about a foot of snow from a second storm system.

More than 1,000 US flights had been cancelled by yesterday afternoon, after 533 were grounded on Tuesday, according to flight tracker FlightAware.

"The biggest factor on both coasts is high winds and winds not aligned with runways,"

FlightAware chief Daniel Baker said.

"This causes significant capacity constraints that leads to long delays and cancellations."

Scores of homes and businesses were damaged Tuesday after 34 tornadoes were reported in the southern US states of Texas, Louisiana, Alabama and Mississippi.

The governors of both Mississippi and Alabama have declared a state of emergency.

More than 200,000 people were still in the cold and dark by yesterday after the storm

knocked down power lines in Arkansas, Mississippi and Texas. The regional utility company said it had brought in outside crews to help but it could be a week before service was fully restored.

Two children were killed after their mother lost control of her vehicle on an icy road in Arkansas on Christmas Day, the state police said. Another person was killed in the state early yesterday as a result of the storm, the Arkansas emergency management service said.

A dozen people were hurt in

a 21-vehicle pileup caused by icy roads in Oklahoma City that started when a truck jackknifed on a major interstate and oncoming cars were not able to stop on the icy roadway, the Oklahoman reported.

Two women were killed in separate crashes in the state on Christmas Day, the state highway patrol said.

A man was killed in rural Louisiana when a tree hit his home on Christmas Day, and a Texas man died in similar circumstances in a Houston suburb, local media reported.





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## INTERNATIONAL NEWS

### Over 1,000 Syrians flee to Turkey after bakery attack

ANKARA (AFP) - More than 1,000 Syrians crossed into Turkey in the last 24 hours after the Syrian regime attacked a bakery in the town of Halfeya, a Turkish foreign ministry official said yesterday.

The latest influx triggered by the bakery attack in Syria has brought the total number of Syrians in Turkey to 148,000, he added.

At least 60 people are reported to have been killed in a regime air strike on a bakery in the rebel-held town of Halfaya, in the central province of Hama on Sunday.

Turkey is home to refugees fleeing the 21-month conflict in neighbouring Syria as well as army defectors who are sheltered in several camps along the border.

Meanwhile, the United Na-

tions yesterday predicted the number of Syrian refugees in neighboring countries will double to 1.1 million by June next year if the country's war is not ended.

There are now more than 540,000 registered refugees in Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and Egypt, according to the latest UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) report on Syria.

That figure has increased by more than 140,000 in six weeks. "Syrians continue to cross borders to seek safety," OCHA said.

Aid groups say hundreds of thousands of Syrians have fled the 21-month old conflict without registering with UN agencies. The United Nations has appealed for \$1 billion to fund refugee operations until June.

### Thousands flee Malaysia floods

KUALA LUMPUR (AFP) - Floods triggered by torrential monsoon rains in Malaysia forced almost 14,000 people to flee their homes and seek shelter at relief centers, the official Bernama news agency said yesterday.

Rain showers which coincided with high tide flooded hundreds of homes in three northeastern states -- Terengganu, Pahang and Kelantan -- with some 13,746 people being housed at evacuation centers, it

said amid forecasts of more rain.

Bernama said the flood situation was deteriorating as the number of evacuees continued to rise and some major roads in Pahang were closed as rivers burst their banks.

Muhammad Helmi Abdullah, the meteorological department's weather forecast director, warned that there could be more rain in Terengganu, Pahang and southern Johor state in the next few days.

### Mandela discharged from hospital

JOHANNESBURG (AFP) - South Africa's ailing former leader Nelson Mandela was discharged from hospital yesterday after spending almost three weeks being treated for a lung infection, the presidency said.

"Former president Nelson Mandela was discharged from hospital this evening," said a statement from President Jacob Zuma's office.

"He will undergo home-

based high care at his Houghton (Johannesburg) home until he fully recovers."

The much-loved 94-year-old anti-apartheid icon was admitted to a hospital in the capital Pretoria on December 8, after being flown from his rural home in Qunu, in the south of the country.

Doctors also discovered that he had developed gallstones and he had surgery to have them removed.

### UN says Russia must not ban adoption

UNITED NATIONS (AFP) - The United Nations said yesterday that Russia must not rule out "inter-country adoption" after the country's parliament passed a bill barring Americans from adopting Russian children.

UN Children's Fund executive director Anthony Lake said the government must make sure that the "current plight of the many Russian children in institutions receives priority attention."

"We encourage the government to establish a robust national social protection plan to

help strengthen Russian families. Alternatives to the institutionalization of children are essential, including permanent foster care, domestic adoption and inter-country adoption," Lake said.

Lake released his statement after the Russian upper house of parliament passed a bill banning Americans from adopting Russian children. The bill, drafted in retaliation for a US law sanctioning Russian officials implicated in the 2009 death of lawyer Sergei Magnitsky -- will become law if signed by President Vladimir

Putin.

The Russian leader now has two weeks in which to sign the legislation.

The bill also includes a provision forbidding Russian political organisations from receiving US funding

The UN agency said child welfare should not be politicized.

"We ask that the government of Russia, in its design and development of all efforts to protect children, let the best interests of children -- and only their best interests -- determine its actions," Lake said.



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## International News

### US gun sales soar as owners fear new regulations

WASHINGTON (AFP) - US firearm sales have sky-rocketed since the Newtown school massacre, as debate over gun control rages and enthusiasts fear certain assault weapons and high-capacity magazines could be banned.

President Barack Obama basically has put gun enthusiasts on warning, Larry Hyatt, owner of a gun shop in Charlotte, North Carolina, told AFP, referring to efforts to outlaw certain weapons in the wake of the Newtown shooting.

A semi-automatic Bushmaster AR-15 assault rifle was used in the Sandy Hook Elementary School massacre in which a disturbed local young man shot dead 20 young children, six adults and his mother before taking his own life.

"Right after it, anti-guns (activists) started talking. The president said he wanted quick action, and so that is going to fuel the buying frenzy, and it is," Hyatt said, describing the rush as largely "politically motivated."

"We have been in business for 50 years, and we have seen (fear-based buying) before," Hyatt said. "But this is more intense because the president got in the media and basically said, 'if you want a gun, you better get it now.'"

That means bigger business for an already huge industry: the gun and ammunition manufacturing industry in the United States groups about 300 companies with combined yearly sales estimated at around \$7 billion.

Florida, the most heavily armed state, rocketed this week to a new record of active carry permits -- over one mil-

lion -- a state government spokesman told AFP. Florida has 19 million people.

Newspapers in rural areas around the country also reported a roaring pre-Christmas trade in guns and magazines, especially at gun shows, long considered a loophole by gun control activists as they often don't require buyers to undergo any background checks.

There were an estimated 310 million non-military firearms in the United States in 2009, roughly one per citizen, and people in America are 20 times more likely to be killed by a gun than someone in another developed country.

The United States has suffered an explosion of gun violence over the last three decades including 62 mass shooting incidents since 1982. The vast majority of weapons used have been semi-automatic handguns and rifles obtained legally by the killers.

The December 14 bloodshed, the latest in a string of mass shootings in the United States, has reopened a national debate on the country's gun laws, which are far more lax than in most other developed nations.

Obama said he would support a new bill to ban assault rifles and put Vice President Joe Biden in charge of a panel looking at a wide range of other measures, from school security to mental health.

Democratic Senator Dianne Feinstein has pledged to table a bill on January 3 that would ban at least 100 military-style semi-automatic assault weapons, and would curb the transfer, importation and the possession of such arms.

### Chavez swearing in could be delayed by illness

CARACAS (AFP) - Venezuela's ruling party and an opposition leader were in rare agreement on Monday that President Hugo Chavez's January 10 inauguration could be delayed if he is still recovering from cancer surgery.

The firebrand leftist leader is experiencing a "slight improvement" in his condition as he follows doctors' orders to rest following his most recent operation in Cuba, Information Minister Ernesto Villegas said.

Speaking in a radio and television address, Villegas said the president is in touch with his closest relatives and has been analyzing the results of

regional elections on December 16, in which the ruling party won 20 of 23 governorships, snatching four states previously held by the opposition.

Chavez, 58, has been in power since 1999. He won another six-year term in October's presidential election.

Maduro said Monday that Chavez could be sworn in by Supreme Court justices, which could pave the way for an oath from Cuba, where the president is recovering from his latest cancer treatment.

Opposition leader Henrique Capriles said he was ready to accept a possible delay in the

inauguration.

His remarks put him at odds with other opposition leaders eager to call new elections if Chavez is unable to return to the country on time.

Analysts say Chavez cannot take the oath of office abroad, even if he were to do so at a Venezuelan embassy with members of the Supreme Court present.

Under Venezuelan law, if Chavez resigns before the inauguration or otherwise has an "absolute absence," National Assembly head Diosdado Cabello would temporarily assume office and elections would be held within 30 days.

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## Bangladesh slaughters 150,000 birds over avian flu

DHAKA (AFP) - Bangladesh's livestock authorities are slaughtering around 150,000 chickens at a giant poultry farm near Dhaka after the worst outbreak of avian flu in five years, officials said yesterday.

The deadly H5N1 strain of flu was detected at Bay Agro farm at Gazipur, 40 kilometres (25 miles) north of Dhaka, on Monday after dozens of chickens died, prompting the company to send samples to a

laboratory for tests.

Bangladesh was hit by bird flu in February 2007, when over one million birds were slaughtered on thousands of farms. Since then the flu has entrenched in the country, seriously ravaging one of the world's largest poultry industries.

The last major outbreak was in March 2010 when at least 117,000 chickens and 200,000 eggs were destroyed at a farm in northern

Bangladesh.

The latest outbreak is the 23rd to be recorded this year. Even before the new mass slaughter, a total of 107,252 chickens had been destroyed in 22 farms, said Ataur Rahman, a livestock control room official.

The country has also reported six confirmed human cases of bird flu since May 2008, but the government's health department said all have recovered

## Ex-president slams Brazil's tough anti-drug bill

BRASILIA (AFP) - A bill calling for tougher sentences for drug possession and mandatory internment of addicts in Brazil has drawn fire from ex-president Fernando Henrique Cardoso, a strong advocate of drug decriminalization.

"Treating drug use as a police case is useless and disastrous," he said in an interview with the daily O Globo published Wednesday.

"Mandatory internment (of addicts) has been internationally condemned as inefficient, stigmatizing and a violation of human rights," said Cardoso who was in office from 1995 to 2002.

The controversial bill, which is to be debated in Congress in February, has a good chance of being adopted in

plenary session after already winning unanimous approval from a special panel.

"Brazilian society, which is faced with the scourge of drugs, wants" tougher legislation against use and possession of drugs," according to lawmaker Osmar Terra, who said there were enough votes for passage of the bill.

Considered the world's largest market for crack and the second for overall cocaine use, Brazil since 2006 has had an ambiguous law on the books that lets authorities decide who is a user and who is a drug trafficker.

"Drugs, particularly crack, are the major health and public security issues in Brazil," Terra said on his web page.

Cardoso, who chairs the Global Commission on Drug

Policy, also insisted Brazil was lagging behind other regional countries with respect to the debate on a new drug strategy.

In October, he urged that what it termed the failed war on drugs be replaced by policies focusing on regulation and prevention.

Insisting that regulation was not the same as legalization, he then urged "all kinds of restrictions and limitations on the production, trade, advertising and consumption of a given substance in order to deglamorize, discourage and control its use."

"Drug abusers may harm themselves and their families, but locking them up is not going to help them," he argued.

## Allergies

-- Allergies occur when your immune system reacts to a foreign substance such as pollen, bee venom or pet dander. The severity of allergies varies from person to person and can range from minor irritation to anaphylaxis — a potentially life-threatening emergency. While allergies can't be cured, a number of treatments can help relieve your allergy symptoms. Allergy symptoms depend on your particular allergy, and can involve the airways, sinuses and nasal passages, skin, and digestive system.



**Hay fever**, also called allergic rhinitis, may cause:

- Congestion
- Itchy, runny nose
- Itchy, watery or swollen eyes (conjunctivitis)

**Atopic dermatitis**, an allergic skin condition also called eczema, may cause:

- Itchy skin
- Red skin
- Flaking or peeling skin

**A food allergy may cause:**

- Tingling mouth
- Swelling of the lips, tongue, face or throat
- Hives
- Anaphylaxis

**An insect sting allergy may cause:**

- A large area of swelling (edema) at the sting site
- Itching or hives all over your body
- Cough, chest tightness, wheezing or shortness of breath
- Anaphylaxis

**A drug allergy may cause:**

- Hives
- Itchy skin
- Rash
- Facial swelling
- Wheezing

You may want to see a doctor if you have symptoms you think may be caused by an allergy, especially if you notice something in your environment that seems to trigger your allergies. If you have symptoms after starting a new medication, call the doctor who prescribed it right away.

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## Russia's brutal early winter claims 123 lives

MOSCOW (AFP) - A bitter cold snap in Russia has claimed 123 lives in the past 10 days, an official said Tuesday, with the early freeze testing authorities in a country used to notoriously tough winters.

Temperatures have plunged as low as minus 30 degrees Celsius (minus 22 degrees Fahrenheit) in the Moscow region and minus 60 degrees Celsius (minus 76 degrees Fahrenheit) in Eastern Siberia. "Since the start of the cold, 123 people have died of exposure and frostbite," a medical source was quoted by the Interfax news agency as saying.

Another 833 people had to be hospitalised to be treated for hypothermia and frostbite, including 123 over the past 24 hours, of whom 14 were children, the source added.

Since the start of the cold snap, 1,745 people were affected, and more than 800 had to be hospitalised, the source said.

With repair work on the power station hampered by the sub-zero conditions, some local people were given shelter at schools that had emergency heating systems.

Some residents, including children, have been lifted by helicopter to the regional centre of Kyzyl, the report said.

Temperatures have been about 12 degrees Celsius lower than seasonal norms in Russia, where the coldest weather usually does not arrive until January or February.

In the Moscow region, Monday saw an all-time record for electricity consumption, Russia's power operator said on Tuesday, blaming the unusually cold temperatures.

In neighbouring Ukraine last week, the cold claimed 83 lives, new data showed.

## Four dead as heavy rains flood Iraq capital

BAGHDAD (AFP) - The worst rains to hit Baghdad in 30 years left four people dead and many of the Iraqi capital's residents struggling to cope with heavy flooding on Wednesday as the government declared a national holiday.

Patients reported long and difficult journeys to hospitals, shopkeepers complained of a lack of business and several roads were immersed in water, in some cases as much as waist-high.

In the predominantly-Shiite northeastern district of Sadr City, the area surrounding Fatima al-Zahra hospital was completely flooded, and



patients said trips that normally took 15 minutes had taken them as long as two hours.

A medic who spoke on condition of anonymity said

four family members -- two men and two women -- were killed and another woman injured when their house in the northeastern outskirts collapsed Tuesday night due to

the heavy rainfall.

The Iraqi Meteorological Organisation reported on Wednesday that 6.75 centimetres (2.56 inches) of rain fell in Baghdad a day earlier, which its chief said was the highest such figure in 30 years.

The heavy rain spurred the government to declare Wednesday a national holiday, the fourth time this year it has been forced to do so because of bad weather. The other three were due to heat during Iraq's boiling summer.

The rain also affected shopkeepers who saw dramatically lower sales as a result of the flooding.



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## Spanish police seize 11 tonnes of hashish

MADRID (AFP) - Spanish police on Wednesday said it had busted a major drug trafficking ring, seizing more than 11 tonnes of hashish destined for Europe and arresting 35 people.

"The dismantled organisa-

tion controlled the entire chain of trafficking, from production to packing, as well as transport to Spain, storage, and distribution throughout Europe.

The ring's main warehouses was located in the central Spanish region of Toledo,

where police seized 8.5 tonnes of the drug, out of a total of "more than 11 tonnes" confiscated in all, it said.

In addition, police seized 150,000 euros in cash and 14 vehicles and 109 cell phones used by the ring.

## Pope urges end to bloodshed in Christmas message

VATICAN CITY (AFP) - Pope Benedict XVI called for an "end to the bloodshed" in Syria and denounced the "savage" violence in Africa on Tuesday, even as Nigeria witnessed a Christmas attack on Christians.

Speaking in his traditional Christmas message, the pope touched on several other of the world's conflict zones.

A capacity crowd of 40,000 pilgrims filled the vast St Peter's Square to hear the 85-year-old pope, resplendent in red vestments, deliver the "Urbi et Orbi" (To the City and to the World) message.

Speaking from the balcony of St Peter's Basilica, the pope called for a return to peace in Nigeria, where he said "savage acts of terrorism continue to reap victims, particularly among Christians."

As he spoke, news was filtering in of a deadly attack there.

Gunmen attacked a church in the northern state of Yobe during a Christmas Eve service, killing six people, including the pastor, before setting the building ablaze.

It was the latest attack blamed on the radical Islamist sect Boko Haram, which has repeatedly targeted churches during times of worship, including multiple attacks last year on Christmas Day.

The pope also prayed for

peace in Syria, whose people have been "deeply wounded and divided by a conflict which does not spare even the defenceless and reaps innocent victims."

In a message watched by millions around the world, he called "for an end to the bloodshed... and dialogue in the pursuit of a political solution to the conflict."

His wide-ranging speech pressed for peace in the Middle East and appealed to China's new leadership to respect religious freedom there.

In Indonesia, more than 200 Muslims threw rotten eggs at Christians wanting to hold a Christmas mass outside Jakarta, police said.

Around a hundred Christian worshippers had gathered for the mass near the spot where they hoped to build a church but saw the project barred by district government and community members.

At the midnight mass in Bethlehem, the most senior Roman Catholic bishop in the Middle East issued a special call for efforts to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

"Only justice and peace in the Holy Land can reestablish balance and stability in the region and in the world," Patriarch Fuad Twal told worshippers in the West Bank city, the traditional birthplace of Jesus.

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## Obama breaks off vacation to deal with fiscal cliff

WASHINGTON/HONOLULU - President Barack Obama is due back in Washington early today for a final effort to negotiate a deal with Congress to avert or at least postpone the "fiscal cliff" of tax increases and government spending cuts set to begin next week.

No specific bill dealing with the cliff was on the schedule of either the U.S. Senate or House of Representatives, which are expected to return today after the holiday break.

Investors are closely watching the talks, concerned that going over the cliff could throw the economy into recession. U.S. stocks slipped yesterday after retailers reported disappointing holiday sales as shoppers tightened belts possibly due to fiscal cliff worries.

Aides and members of Congress have said that a modest, last-minute measure to avoid the spending cuts and most of the tax hikes could pass the Democratic-controlled Senate if Republicans agree not to use

a procedural roadblock known as a filibuster, a commitment that Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell has so far not made.

The legislative focus continues to shift from deficit reduction to averting the immediate shock of the December 31 cliff dive.

## Starbucks to use cups for "fiscal cliff" message to lawmakers

**Starbucks Corp will use its ubiquitous coffee cups to tell U.S. lawmakers to come up with a deal to avoid going over the "fiscal cliff" of automatic tax hikes and government spending cuts.**

Chief Executive Howard Schultz is urging workers in Starbucks' roughly 120 Washington-area shops to write "come together" on customers' cups on Thursday and Friday, as President Barack Obama and lawmakers return to work and attempt to revive fiscal cliff negotiations that collapsed before the Christmas holiday.



## Toyota ups 2012 sales forecast to 9.7 mn vehicles

TOKYO (AFP) - Japan's Toyota group forecast yesterday a 22 percent jump in worldwide sales this year to 9.7 million units, driven by surging demand which may help it regain the top spot in the global auto market.

Those figures could put Toyota ahead of General Motors and Volkswagen as the world's biggest automaker, a title it held between 2008 and 2010 but lost last year after a slump in sales and production.

Japan's biggest automaker said it expects to sell about 9.91 million vehicles in 2013, up two percent on-year. It was on track to produce 9.94 million vehicles in 2013, nearly unchanged from this year, the company added.

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## Finance

## US home prices up in October from year earlier

WASHINGTON (AFP) - US home prices rose 4.3 percent in October as compared with last year, the fastest 12-month increase since May 2010, according to S&P/Case-Shiller statistics released yesterday.

The 20-city price index declined 0.1 percent from September, according to data not adjusted for seasonal variations, but the group emphasized the strong year-on-year figures.

On a seasonally adjusted basis, the index climbed 0.7 percent between September and October.

"It is clear that the housing recovery is gathering strength," said David Blitzer, head of the index committee.

"Higher year-over-year price gains plus strong performances in the southwest and

California, regions that suffered during the housing bust, confirm that housing is now contributing to the economy."

According to Barclays Research, the 4.3 percent year-on-year rise represented the "fastest pace of increase since May 2010 when the home-buyer tax credit was boosting sales and prices."

While Phoenix home prices rose for the 13th month in a row, San Diego posted nine consecutive monthly gains. Only Chicago and New York saw negative annual returns in October.

Twelve cities saw a drop in prices last month according to non-seasonally adjusted data, compared to seven in September. Chicago saw a decline of 1.5 percent while prices in Boston dipped 1.4 percent.

## Nikkei hits 9-month high as Abe takes over as prime minister



**The Nikkei climbed to its highest point in nine months yesterday as the yen fell to a 20-month low on expectations that Japan's new prime minister would push for more aggressive monetary and fiscal policies, boosting shares of exporters like Sony Corp (6758.T). Shares of real estate and financial companies also benefited from hopes for the new government under Shinzo Abe, who was confirmed as prime minister by the lower house of parliament just before the market close. Abe has promised to push for aggressive monetary easing by the Bank of Japan and big government spending to rescue the economy from its fourth recession since 2000. He also pledged to mend Japan's alliance with the United States in the face of an assertive China**



# Aruba's Temple Beth Israel hosts a very special B'nai Mitzvah over the holidays



B'nai Mitzvah girl and boy with their families and grandparents

-- December is a common month for Jewish youth to formally be formally recognized as adults by their congregation. The boys become a Bar Mitzvah and girls a Bat Mitzvah. Aruba's Temple Beth Israel was very pleased to host the B'nai Mitzvah of cousins Rebecca Malever and Michael Simon on Monday morning, December 24. Their parents decided to combine the holiday break with this landmark event, and report "it has been a delightful experience for all the family."

"We had friends who had done this in St John," recalled Michael's mother, Michelle. "They were raving about how wonderful and spiritual it was." Michelle's sister, Carla, was also planning her daughter's Bat Mitzvah, and it was decided to do it jointly, while the families, siblings and grandparents all enjoyed a

Caribbean sojourn.

They investigated the U.S. Virgin Islands, but they wanted a place where they could be assured of the weather. Curacao is, of course, famous for having the oldest continuing operating synagogue in the Western Hemisphere, Temple Emmanuel. Their spiritual leader, Hazzan Avery Tracht inform the Stern sisters that the extremely orthodox temple's rules consider Michael too young at twelve to be a Bar Mitzvah, but suggested they inquire with the liberal-minded Temple Beth Israel in Aruba.

"Martha Lichtenstein, President of the Board of Temple Beth Israel was most welcoming and understanding," they report. Arrangements were made, and Hazzan Tracht joined them in Aruba to preside over this

beloved tradition.

Michael and Rebecca read their Torah portions perfectly before their parents, Michelle and Gary and Carla and Greg. Their siblings and three sets of grandparents were in attendance to share the day. It was a ceremony filled with love and family.

Both Michael and Rebecca discussed portions of the Torah dealing with the stories of Jacob and Joseph, relating them to lessons from which modern families can learn. Joseph may have had the ultimate "dysfunctional family," as his being the favorite of his father Jacob made his twelve brothers so jealous they sold him into slavery. Despite this setback in life, Joseph rose to become only second to the Pharaoh in power in Egypt. He eventually forgave his brothers their transgressions, teaching all a lesson in forgiveness and the importance of family.

Both the Malevers and Simons expressed their enormous pride in their children and how hard they worked to perform so beautifully on this important day. The simplicity of the surroundings and the beauty of the island added immeasurably to its significance. They thoroughly enjoyed this touching moment with all their family, combined with connecting with the local Jewish community.

by Rosalie Klein



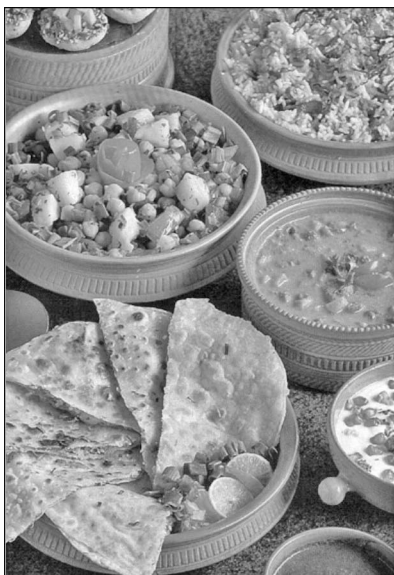
Hazzan Avery Tracht with Michael and Rebecca



Rebecca with Opa Stern, Dad Greg and Mom Carla



Michael and his parents Gary and Michelle read from the Torah



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## 5 Burgers Aruba: Now your best breakfast bargain!



A favorite stop for a great burger for lunch or dinner has just expanded their hours and menu to offer some of the best breakfast bargains to be found in Palm Beach. Owners Aaron and Rosie Walisever are living their dream: a home on paradise while welcoming all and sundry to their proud undertaking, 5 Burgers Aruba. The couple's fanatical dedication to giving their customers what they really want has resulted in a unique menu from an interna-

tionally known franchise with a "5", which now includes breakfast.

"You never get a second chance to make a first impression," believes Aaron. Upon entering 5 Burgers Aruba in The Village Mall in Palm Beach, one is struck by utterly spotless surroundings and a smiling, friendly, attentive service crew. Of course, the main item on the menu is burgers-the way they were meant to be, thick and juicy, made fresh daily and 100%

pure beef, the kind that made the hamburger a traditional American treat.

However, beginning at 7 a.m., patrons can now order 2 eggs any style, (omelets with 3 fillings are \$7.99) toast and coffee with unlimited refills for the special introductory price of only \$4.49, (\$5.48 with bacon) or All-you-can-eat pancakes, for \$6.99, again, with free refills on fresh coffee. Breakfast is served until 11 a.m. Famous for their fries made from fresh potatoes, Aaron has been working for months on devising the most irresistible home fries recipe, chunky and tender with skins still on; after much testing and tasting, he got the thumbs up from his harshest critic, Rosie; so this is another treat you have to try.

A glance at their burger menu will certainly tempt you to return for lunch or dinner, to sample their famous specialty items such as the Gouda, Farmer's or Man

Burger (almost 12 ounces of choice beef), and a Western Burger with Aaron's secret-recipe crispy onion rings. All of these can be personalized with an incredible array of toppings, (mushrooms, jalapeño peppers, bacon, cheese,



lettuce, tomato...whatever, the list goes on) at absolutely no extra cost.

5 Burger portions are ENORMOUS! Aaron suggests that even their small serving of fries is enough to

be shared by two. He was very amused to watch a famous French chef demonstrating the best way to make fried potatoes on a gourmet cooking show and could only comment "He stole my recipe!"

Try them the English way-with vinegar, and you'll wonder how you ever ate fries without it. This same 5-star chef also swears by Gouda as the best topping for the ideal gourmet cheeseburger.

5 Burgers is now open early until 10-ish at night; delivery is available to both the high-rise and low-rise hotel and beach district at now extra cost for orders over \$50. Enjoy a great lunch without ever leaving the beach by calling 586-3904. However, we suggest you stop by and enjoy their authentic, heartfelt hospitality; it is not unusual for either owner to sit and chat, sharing their knowledge of the island while making sure patrons are happy with their meal.



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## Figure skating: Hurt Plushenko clinches 10th Russian title



MOSCOW (AFP) - Yevgeny Plushenko overcame severe back pain to clinch his 10th Russian figure skating title on Wednesday on the same Sochi ice where the 2014 Winter Olympics will take place.

Former triple world champion Plushenko, the 2006 Olympic gold medalist, who was leading the men's section

after the short programme, confirmed his domination at the newly-built 12,000-seat Iceberg Arena with a solid presentation of his free routine to collect 265.94 points overall.

The 30-year-old finished 11.87 points ahead of second-placed Sergei Voronov, while Konstantin Menshov, won bronze with 228.88.

## Cricket: South Africa win Twenty20 international series

PORT ELIZABETH, South Africa (AFP) - South Africa clinched their Twenty20 international series against New Zealand when they won the third and final match by 33 runs at St George's Park on Wednesday.

Henry Davids hit 68 in a South African total of 179 for six.

New Zealand were never on target after left-arm spinner Aaron Phangiso dismissed key batsmen Martin Guptill and Brendon McCullum in successive overs. Phangiso and Ryan McLaren both took three for 25.



Brief scores: South Africa 179 for six in 20 overs. New Zealand 146 for nine in 20

overs. Result: South Africa won by 33 runs. Series: South Africa won 2-1.

## Former Braves OF Andruw Jones arrested



Atlanta - Former Atlanta Braves outfielder Andruw Jones was arrested on Tuesday on suspicion of domestic battery.

The Journal-Constitution re-

ported Wednesday that Jones was taken into custody in Gwinnett County early on Christmas morning after allegedly assaulting his wife, Nicole.

The 35-year-old power hitter was booked into Gwinnett County Jail at approximately 4 a.m. ET but released hours later on \$2,500 bond.

A native of Curacao, Jones hit just .197 with 14 home runs and 34 RBI in 94 games with the New York Yankees a season ago. In 2,196 appearances for the Braves (1996-2007), Dodgers (2008), Rangers (2009), White Sox (2010) and Yankees (2011-12), Jones is a lifetime .254 hitter who has slugged 434 homers, drove in 1,289 runs and scored 1,204 times.

Jones will play in 2013 for Tohoku of Japan's Pacific League.

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## Tennis: Pressure off as Murray targets more majors

ABU DHABI (AFP) - Andy Murray believes his landmark US Open triumph has lifted so much pressure off his shoulders that his path to more Grand Slam glory in 2013 is now free of self-doubt.

World number three Murray became the first British man since 1936 to win a major when he defeated Novak Djokovic to clinch the US Open in September, with his triumph coming in the slipstream of his Olympic Games gold medal.

Now the 25-year-old is determined to build on his breakthrough year, starting by



easing into the new campaign with a three-day exhibition in Abu Dhabi before heading to Australia for the season's first Grand Slam tournament.

"I don't know how I will feel going into the first round of the Australian Open so it will be a new feeling for me and I just have to deal with it."

Murray knows the spotlight will be trained firmly on him when Wimbledon comes around in June.

Fred Perry, in 1936, was the last British man to win Wimbledon although Murray came close in 2012, reaching the final before slipping to a tearful defeat to Roger Federer.

"All the players would want to win Wimbledon. It's six months away and there can be a lot of changes in terms of sport by then and I haven't started thinking about it right now," Murray said.

## Red Sox acquire Hanrahan in six-player swap



BOSTON, Massachusetts (AFP) - The Boston Red Sox acquired closing pitcher Joel Hanrahan from Pittsburgh Pirates on Wednesday in a six-player trade.

Infielder Brock Holt will also go to Boston, while the Pirates get pitchers Mark Melancon and Stolmy Pimentel, infielder Ivan De Jesus and utility man Jerry Sands.

Hanrahan has notched 76 saves over the past two seasons with the Pirates, fourth-best in the National League.

That included 36 saves in 2012 for the 31-year-old two-time All-Star.

The Red Sox also confirmed Wednesday they have inked shortstop Stephen Drew to a one-year deal.

Drew, the younger brother of former Red Sox outfielder J.D. Drew, played last season for both Arizona and Oakland.

In 79 games he had seven home runs and 28 runs batted in and after joining Oakland in August helped the Athletics win the National League West division title.

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## NBA: League-best Clippers stretch win streak to 14

LOS ANGELES (AFP) - Jamal Crawford scored 22 points and Matt Barnes added 20 as the NBA-leading Los Angeles Clippers stretched their winning streak to 14 games in a row by defeating the Denver Nuggets 112-100 on Tuesday.

The Clippers, who have reached the playoffs only once since 1997, improved to 22-6, taking the best record in the league after Oklahoma City fell to 21-6 with a loss earlier Tuesday at Miami in a rematch of June's NBA Finals.

Chris Paul added 14 points and a game-high eight assists

for the Clippers, the most of any Los Angeles starter as the hosts outscored Denver 42-22 in the second quarter for a 67-48 half-time lead and cruised through the second half.

Blake Griffin had 13 points, six rebounds and six assists for the Clippers while Lamar Odom grabbed 10 rebounds for the winners.

Jordan Hamilton and Kosta Koufos each scored 16 points to lead the Nuggets while Ty Lawson added 15 for Denver, which fell to 15-14.

While in Chicago - James Harden scored 26 points and

Jeremy Lin added 20 points and 11 assists to spark the Houston Rockets to a 120-97 NBA victory over the Chicago Bulls also on Tuesday.

The Rockets improved to 15-12, sixth in the Western Conference, with their fourth victory in a row, a streak that began in New York when Lin returned to beat his former Knicks teammates at Madison Square Garden earlier this month.

Asian American star Lin, whose parents are from Taiwan, came off the Knicks bench last February to ignite a

win streak for the club with shooting and clutch play that touched off a global phenomenon dubbed "Lin-sanity."

Chandler Parsons added 23 points for the Rockets, who outscored the Bulls 31-19 in the second quarter and 36-27 in the third period, pulling ahead by as much as 86-51 late in the third quarter.

Nate Robinson led the Bulls with 21 points, while Italy's Marco Belinelli added 15 points and Britain's Luol Deng contributed 14 for the Bulls, who fell to 15-12, falling behind Indiana (16-12) in the

fight for the Central division lead.

And in Miami - LeBron James scored 29 points, passed out nine assists and grabbed eight rebounds on Tuesday to spark the Miami Heat over the Oklahoma City Thunder 103-97 in a rematch of last June's NBA Finals.

The reigning NBA champion Heat won their fifth game in a row and improved to 19-6, the best record in the Eastern Conference, while the Thunder lost for the second game in a row after a 12-game win streak, falling to 21-6.

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